

**Thomas Jefferson to Jacob Crowninshield, May 13, 1806, from The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve Volumes. Federal Edition. Collected and Edited by Paul Leicester Ford.**

**TO JACOB CROWNINSHIELD J. MSS.**

Monticello, May 13, 06.

Dear Sir, —I was able to get from Washington a few days ago, and am here for about three weeks to unbend, as much as the current business will permit, with the aid of the country recreations. A little before my departure the incident took place at New York, on the subject of which I saw letters from yourself & General Barnham who were witnesses of the effect produced. Altho' the scenes which were acted on shore were overdone with electioneering views, yet the act of the British officer was an atrocious violation of our territorial rights. The question what should be done was a difficult one, the sending three frigates was one suggestion. Our peace establishment allows the employment of 925 men, which might man 3 frigates; & I think the construction sound that the force in the Mediterranean might be considered as our war establishment making no part of the 925 men, but as having been sent there under another law. But if no part of our peace establishment, the war being over they must be called home if considered under the war statute, and if kept there it could be only as a part of the peace establishment. We had in fact ordered home one frigate and directed one to remain there with two brigs. The *Chesapeake* was under repair, destined for the Mediterranean on account of the Tunisian threats, but would not be ready within a month. While we were thus unable to present a force of that kind at N. York we received from Mr. Merry the most solemn assurances that

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the meeting of the three British vessels at New York was entirely accidental from different quarters & that they were not to remain there. We concluded therefore that it was best to do what you have seen in the proclamation, and to make a proper use of the outrage and of our forbearance at St. James's, to obtain better provisions for the future. We expect daily to hear of the return of our Mediterranean gunboats to Charleston, which with those expected to descend the Ohio, & some from Commodore Preble, will enable us to put N. Orleans & N. York (our most vulnerable points) the former in a state of good security, the latter out of danger of having the city assaulted by a small force. And the boats to be constructed this year, with land-batteries will give to N. York also good security. But the building some ships of the line instead of our most indifferent frigates is not to be lost sight of. That we should have a squadron properly composed to prevent the blockading our ports is indispensable. The Atlantic frontier from numbers, wealth, & exposure to potent enemies have a proportionate right to be defended with the Western frontier, for whom we keep up 3000 men. Bringing forward the measure therefore in a moderate form, placing it on the ground of comparative right, our nation which is a just one, will come into it, notwithstanding the repugnance of some on the subject being first presented. A second conference between Monroe and Fox gives us confident hope that our matters there will be properly settled. The measures we have taken were necessary even to alarm the British merchants & to give the ministry their support in what they were disposed to do. Accept friendly salutations & assurances of great esteem.